

You Can Read Me Anything by ifwallscouldspeak

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Summary:

For every book Nancy checks out, there's a small, scribbled name right above hers on the due date slip: Kali Prasad-Hopper.

(Inspired by the prompt, “you might like this” and Meg Cabot’s How to Be Popular.)

You Can Read Me Anything

Author's Note:

- For [Rumaan](#).

For one of the coolest people in fandom ever <3

Title from “The Book of Love” by Peter Gabriel.

Written for my personal 2018 [Femslash February](#) challenge :)

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Nancy Wheeler isn’t quite sure what came first: loving speculative fiction or loving Kali-Prasad Hopper. But maybe that doesn’t really matter; in all the ways that count, the two are inextricably tied together in her mind.

It starts like this:

On her thirteenth birthday, her mom drags her to the Hawkins Public Library. She sulks in the backseat the entire ride, complaining that no one made Mike go to the mall when it was his birthday and American Eagle was having their 50% on all jeans sale. Her mother glares at her through the rearview mirror and Nancy just crosses her arms over her chest.

“American Eagle has sales every week!” Mike squeaks at her. “But the library only has a D&D tournament once a year.”

Nancy rolls her eyes at him and his best friend, Will. They’re both clutching stacks of printouts and bags full of dice to their chests. They’re so rosy-faced and eager that it makes Nancy feel a little bad for complaining so much.

But just a little.

“You guys are such losers,” Nancy mutters.

“Nancy,” her mother says warningly.

Nancy grunts out an apology and slumps lower in her seat. She’s not sure why she even has to be with them, anyway. She’s thirteen now. Couldn’t her mother just leave her at home by herself? She’s practically an adult.

When they get to the library, it’s teaming with kids and teenagers of all ages, running around in costumes and spread out on all of the tables playing their weird game. Mike and Will immediately race over to their group of friends, shouting and carrying on. Nancy wants to tell them to shut up, just out of spite, because this is a library. Except the local librarian is dressed up like a troll or something and has a toddler in her arms pretending to take a bite out of one chunky leg. Nancy curls her lip up in annoyance, and turns to ask her mom if she can just leave. Except now, her mother’s deep in conversation with Mrs. Sinclair, and who knows how long that will take.

Nancy sighs and goes up to the second floor of the library, where the young adult section is. When she reaches the landing, she notices it’s much, much quieter. There’s no one else up here, besides some older boy shelving books. Nancy ignores him and wanders over to the Suggested Reading table, just trying to waste time until her mother comes to get her.

She flips through a couple of the books half-heartedly. She’s not interested in most of them, and the rest she’s read already. And it’s not that she’s a nerd or anything, alright? It’s just that, hello, who hasn’t read the first *Harry Potter* at her age?

“This one’s pretty good, if you like *The Philosopher’s Stone*,” a curt voice says next to her.

Nancy jumps, startled. A girl about her age, with jet-black hair and brown skin stands next to her. Nancy blinks for a few moments, not saying anything. The girl huffs and then pushes the book into her hands. Nancy looks down at the battered copy of *A Wrinkle in Time*.

“I just finished it,” the girl says. “There’s four more in the series.”

Nancy says, “I’m only here because my brother’s playing that dumb game downstairs.”

The girl gives her a dirty look. “I was just trying to be helpful.”

But when she tries to reach for the novel back, Nancy pulls it closer to her. Her fingers grip on the spine. She’s not sure why, but suddenly, she doesn’t want to let go of the book. The girl’s face softens for a moment, and then she shrugs and walks away.

Nancy stares after her, waiting until she’s out of sight, before tentatively opening the book. She flips towards the back, where the due date slip is stamped. The last name written, in careful cursive, is *Kali Prasad-Hopper*.

Nancy bites her lip, and then goes back to the beginning of the book. She reads the first page, eyebrows rising as she starts to skim the story. Before she knows it, she’s slouched down into a beanbag chair in the corner, finishing the first chapter and then the next. By the time her mother comes to find her, she’s almost halfway through the book.

It continues like this:

Nancy devours the original Time Quartet and then cries when she realizes *An Acceptable Time* is about Meg and Calvin’s daughter. Her mother has to ask her three times on their way home from the library if she’s going to be okay. Nancy can’t do much more besides sniffle incoherently.

She asks the librarian what other books are like these, and she ends up reading the rest of the Kairos books and everything in the Chronos series as well. When *A Ring of Endless Light* comes out on the Disney channel, she spends ten days complaining to Mike about how the book was better before Mike turns to her and cheeses, “who’s the loser now?”

She doesn’t talk to him for two weeks, and spends most of that time trying to find even more speculative fiction to get through. She’s sure

she doesn't do this on purpose, but besides Lloyd Alexander, she manages to only read things by women, often veering into fantasy and horror. She even starts cycling through her favorite authors multiple times: Eva Ibbotson and Tamora Pierce, Octavia Butler and Isabel Allende and Ursula Le Guin as she got older.

No matter what she reads though, there's always one constant. For every book Nancy checks out, there's a small, scribbled name right above hers on the due date slip: *Kali Prasad-Hopper*. It's always the first thing that Nancy checks for, when she picks up a new books. And practically each time, the signature is there; each time, it gives her a little thrill to her heart, though she's not sure why. She goes through novel after novel wondering what the girl - Kali - had thought about them. She gently fingers sentences underlined in light pencil and wonder if that was her. And even though she barely spoke two words to her, all those years before, Nancy wonders what it would be like to have a conversation with her. Ask her what her favorite parts were and what lines she would change and *holy shit, wasn't it nuts when they got to Acorn and everything was gone?*

It ends (begins) like this:

On her seventeenth birthday, she drives herself to the Hawkins Public Library. *The Gilda Stories* is in the seat next to her, like it's a passenger all on its own. She's supposed to pick up Barb so they can go out to dinner, but she needs to make a stop first. She's thinking about extending her loan on the book. She needs to keep it for a few more days, she's decided, so that she can really get into some of the subtext of the narrative. Or rather, that's what she tells herself. It has nothing to do with the fact that this is the only book, in all of the years she's borrowed, that Kali hasn't gotten to first. She absolutely doesn't want it for longer so she can mull over whether or not to underline some of the passages or add post-its to her favorite chapters, in the hopes that Kali would be the next person to take it out. Nope. Not at all. Because that would be ridiculous, considering she hasn't seen this girl since she was thirteen.

Nancy meanders around the science fiction section, wondering if she should give Margaret Atwood a try, when she spots a shock of dark-purple hair at the end of the row. Nancy turns just slightly, and her hearts skips too many beats. Because this girl - it's her. It's Kali.

Standing there, with a frustrated look on her face as she reads the back cover of a thick book. From where Nancy stands she can see *Lucifer's Hammer* in bold letters.

Nancy's mouth goes dry.

Kali sighs and shoves the book back onto the shelf, before reaching out to grab another one. Nancy's legs move without her permission and her heartbeat pounds in her ears. She just know that at any moment, the librarian will run right over to her and shush and her erratic heart.

“Here,” Nancy says, shoving *The Gilda Stories* at Kali.

Kali glances up at her slowly, without a hint of surprise on her face. “Excuse me?”

“You might like this,” Nancy says, feeling tongue-tied and incredibly, incredibly stupid.

Kali takes the book from her slowly. “Okay -”

“Because I loved it,” Nancy rushes to get out. “And - I think it’ll be right up your alley.”

Kali raises one eyebrow at her. “Huh.”

“Sorry,” Nancy’s face burns. “You - I’m not a creep, I swear. You probably don’t remember me -”

“No, I do,” Kali says, a smile curving onto her face. “*A Wrinkle in Time*.”

“Yes,” Nancy says. “Yes that’s - that’s me.”

Something sparks in Kali’s dark eyes. “Are you the one who’s checked out *The Dispossessed* four times?”

“Uh.” Nancy says, “Yeah.”

She watches as Kali’s fingers circle around *The Gilda Stories*, clutching it tightly to her. Nancy isn’t sure what to do next but she just stands

there, watching as Kali reads the back cover of the book. Her eyebrows go up again before her face smoothens out. Nancy shifts, wondering if she should just run away. But when Kali looks up at her, she has a teasing smile on her face.

“Thanks for the suggestion, Nancy,” Kali says slowly.

Nancy almost chokes on her own spit. “You’re welcome.”

Kali asks, “You want to go to the coffee shop around the corner? I’d love to hear more about what other books you like.”

Nancy’s eyes widen. “I - uhm -”

“Unless you have plans -”

“No!” Nancy says quickly. “Uhm - I mean, yes. Let’s go get coffee.”

“Bitchin,” Kali grins at her.

“It’s a date,” Nancy says.

She’s so busy smiling back and trying to ignore the butterflies in her stomach that she doesn’t realize what she’s said until Kali’s eyes widen in surprise pleasure. Nancy freezes for a moment, eyes scanning across Kali’s face. But Kali’s still smiling back at her, and then her eyes are dragging across Nancy’s face. There’s something there, something that makes Nancy want to blush all the way down to her toes.

“Yeah,” Kali says. “It’s a date.”

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